

Basically, this duty was entrusted to only four distinguished persons named above, but later on, other Companions were also attached to help them out. (Fath al-Bari, pp. 13-15, v. 9)

They performed the following functions in connection with the writing of the Qur'ān:

1. In the copy prepared during the period of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه, Sūrahs were not placed in sequence, rather each Sūrah was written separately. They wrote down all Sūrahs in their proper sequence in a single copy. (Mustadrak, 2/229)

2. The verses of the noble Qur'ān were written in a way so that all readings backed by uninterrupted succession could be incorporated within their script. Therefore, no dots or desinential marks were placed on them so that the text could be recited in accordance with all readings that are supported by uninterrupted succession. For instance, they wrote نَسْرَهَا in order that it could be read both نَسْرَهَا and نَسْرُهَا, because both readings are correct. (Manahil al- 'Irfan, 1/253-254)

3. Upto this time, there existed only one single copy of the noble Qur'ān - complete, authentically standard and collectively attested by the whole *ummah*. These distinguished persons prepared more than one copy of this newly organized *Muṣḥaf* (copy of the Qur'ān).

It is generally believed that Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه had accomplished the preparation of five copies, but Abū Hātim Sijistānī says that a total of seven copies were prepared. Out of these one was sent to Makkah al-Mukarramah, one to Syria, one to Yamān, one to Bahrain, one to Baṣrah and one to Kūfah, and one was preserved in Madīnah al-Tayyibah.

4. To accomplish the task cited above, these revered elders basically worked through the pages of the Qur'ān which were written during the times of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه. But, along with it, as a matter of added precaution, they adopted exactly the same method that was employed during the times of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه. Consequently, assorted copies of texts committed into writing during the days of the Holy Prophet ﷺ which were preserved by different Companions were recalled once again, and it was, by yet another collation with these, that the new copies were prepared. This time, a separately written verse of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, مِنْ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ رِجَالٌ صَدَقُوا مَا عَاهَدُوا اللَّهَ عَلَيْهِمْ was

found with Sayyidnā Thābit al-Anṣārī رضى الله عنه only. As we have explained earlier, it does not mean that nobody else remembered this verse because Sayyidnā Zayd رضى الله عنه has himself said: 'While writing the copy of the Qur'ān, I could not find the particular verse of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb which I used to hear the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم recite.' This shows very clearly that the verse under reference was something Sayyidnā Zayd and other Companions remembered very well. On the other hand, it also does not mean that this verse never existed in writing anywhere, because this verse was obviously there in the pages of the Qur'ān written during the times of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه. Besides that, obviously enough, this verse was also included in the copies of the noble Qur'ān which were written and preserved by the Companions on their own. But, like it was in the days of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه, this time too, all those scattered documents, available with the Companions in writing, were collected together, therefore, Sayyidnā Zayd رضى الله عنه and others with him did not write down any verse into these copies of the Qur'ān until such time when they did find it in those written documentations as well. As such, the fact was that other verses were found written separately too with several Companions, but this verse from Sūrah al-Aḥzāb was not found written separately with anyone else except Sayyidnā Khudhaymah رضى الله عنه.

5. After having these several standard copies of the Qur'ān prepared, Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه had all copies personally kept by different Companions burnt so that all copies of the Qur'ān become uniform in terms of the script, incorporation of accepted readings and the order of chapters, leaving no room for any difference between them.

The entire *ummah* acknowledged this achievement of Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه with admiration, and the Companions supported him in this venture. The only exception is that of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd رضى الله عنه who was somewhat unhappy about it, something that cannot be taken up here in its proper perspective. Sayyidnā 'Alī رضى الله عنه says:

"Say nothing about 'Uthmān unless it be in his favour because, by God, whatever he did in connection with copies of the Qur'ān was done in the presence of all of us, and with our advice and counsel." (Fath

Steps Taken to Facilitate Recitation

After the afore-mentioned achievement of Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān رضى الله عنه, the *ummah* reached a consensus on the rule that it is not permissible to write the text of the noble Qur’ān using any method other than the ‘Uthmāni Script. Consequently, all copies of the Qur’ān were, later on, written in accordance with this method, and the Companions and their successors, may Allah be pleased with them all, by bringing forth repeatedly, reproductions of the standard ‘Uthmāni copies of the Qur’ān, helped spread the noble Qur’ān on a vast scale.

But, the copies of the noble Qur’ān were still devoid of dots and vowel points or desinential marks which made it difficult for non-Arabs to recite them freely. As Islam spread out wide and deep in non-Arab countries, the need to add dots and vowel points became acute, in order that people may be able to recite them easily. Several steps were taken to achieve this purpose. Their brief history is as follows:

Inclusion of Dots

The practice of placing dots over or under letters was just not there among early Arabs, however, the readers were so used to this style that they had practically no difficulty in reading dot-less writing to the limit that they would easily distinguish between doubtful letters by referring to the context. Specially, there was no possibility of any doubt in the case of the noble Qur’ān because its preservation did not rest on writing, rather on the strength of memories, pursuant to which, Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān رضى الله عنه had assigned *Qārīs*, accomplished reciters of the Qur’ān, along with its copies sent out to various parts of the Muslim world so that they could teach how to read it.

There are different reports as to who first placed dots on the copy of the noble Qur’ān. Some reports say that this feat was first accomplished by Ḥaḍrat Abū al-Aswad al-Du‘alī رحمه الله عليه (al-Burhan, 1/250). Some say he did this under the instructions of Sayyidnā ‘Alī رضى الله عنه (Subh al-A’sha, 3/155). There are others who have said that Ziyād ibn Abī Sufyān, the Governor of Kufah, asked him to do this. Then there is yet another report which credits Hajjaj ibn Yūsuf with this feat who did it with the help of Ḥasan al-Basrī, Yahya ibn Ya‘mur and Naṣr ibn ‘Aṣim al-Laythī, may Allah’s mercy be upon them all. (Tafsir al-Qurtubi, 1/63)

Marks for correct reading

In the beginning, like dots, the Qur'ān did not have any desinential marks either. Here too, reports are at variance as to who placed desinential marks first. Some say Abū al-Aswad al-Du'ālī did it first while others claim that this was accomplished by Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf through Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur and Naṣr ibn 'Aṣim al-Laythī. (Ibid)

Keeping in view all reports in this connection, it appears that desinential marks were first invented by Abū al-Aswad al-Du'ālī, but they were not like what they are today. Instead, placed there for *fathah* was a dot (•) over the letter, for *kasrah* a dot (◌◌) under the letter, for *ḍammah* a dot (◌◌◌) in front of the letter; and there were two dots (◌◌ or ◌◌◌ or ◌◌◌) for *tanwīn* or nunnation. It was only later that Khalīl ibn Ahmad innovated the signs of *hamzah* (glottal stop) and *tashdīd* (doubling). (Subh al-A'sha, 3/160-161) After that, Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf requested Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur, Naṣr ibn 'Aṣim al-Laythī and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, may Allah's mercy be upon them all, to simultaneously place dots and desinential marks on the text of the noble Qur'ān. On this occasion, the present forms of desinential marks were chosen to replace dots as expression of case signs. The purpose was to avoid confusing them with dots intrinsically belonging to letters.

Aḥzāb or Manazil

It was the practice of Companions and their Successors that they would complete the recital of the entire Qur'ān once every week. For this purpose, they had identified fixed portions for their daily recitation which is known as '*ḥizb*' or '*manzil*'. Thus the entire Qur'ān was divided over seven '*aḥzāb*' (plural of '*ḥizb*') '*manāzil*' (plural of '*manzil*').

(al-Burhan, 1/250)

Ajzā' or Parts

Today, the Qur'ān is divided over thirty '*ajzā'*' (plural of '*juz*') or parts. This division in parts has nothing to do with the meaning of the Qur'ān. In fact, this division in thirty equal parts has been made to serve as teaching aid for children as, it will be noticed, there are places where the designated part ends with an unfinished statement. It is difficult to say with certainty as to who brought about this division of

the Qur'ān in thirty parts. Some people believe that Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه had arranged to have these written in thirty different folio-units while their copies were being made, therefore, this division dates back to his time for sure. But, this humble writer was unable to find any proof of this position in the writings of earlier scholars. However, 'Allāmah Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī has written that the thirty parts of the Qur'ān have been known all along and they customarily appear in copies of the Qur'ān used in schools. (al-Burhan, 1/250; Manahil al-'Irfan, 1/402)

Akhmās and A'shār: The sets of Fives and Tens

Another sign used in Qur'ānic copies of early centuries was that they would write the word, *khamṣ* (خمس : five) or its abbreviation (خ) after every five verses (on the margin); and the word, 'Ashr (عشر : ten) or its abbreviation (ع) after every ten verses. The former kind of signs were called 'Akhmās' (a pentad or group of five) and the later, 'A'shār' (a decade or group of ten). Consequent to another difference among early scholars, these signs were considered permissible by some, and reprehensible or *makrūh* by others. Saying, with any degree of certainty, as to who was the first to place the signs, is difficult indeed. According to one view, Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf was its inventor, while another view credits this to an order of 'Abbasi Khalīfah, al-Ma'mūn (al-Burhan, 1/251). But, these two views do not appear to be sound since the idea of *a'shār* seems to be there during the times of the Companions. For example, *Masrūq* a well-known *Tabi'ī*, says that with Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd رضى الله عنه the placement of 'A'shār' markings in the copy of the Qur'ān was *makrūh*. (Musannaf ibn Abi Shaybah, 2/497).

Rukū' or Section

Moreover, the signs of *Akhmās* and *A'shār* were abandoned later on but, yet another sign which continues on even to this day is the sign of *rukū'* or section. This has been determined in terms of the contents of the noble Qur'ān whereby a sign of *rukū'* (the letter ع on the margin) is placed at the conclusion of a statement. In spite of his efforts, this humble writer was unable to locate anything authentic which would tell us as to who originated the *rukū'*, and in what period. However, this much is almost certain that the purpose of this sign is to identify an average portion of verses which could be recited in one *raka'ah*. It is called '*rukū'*' so that *rukū'* (bending position) could be made in *ṣalāh*.

after reaching this point. There are 540 *rukū'āt* in the whole Qur'ān. So, by reciting one *rukū'* in every *raka'ah* of *tarāwih*, it is possible to complete the recital of the entire Qur'ān on the night of the twenty seventh (Fatawa 'Alamgiryah, Fasl al-Tarawih, 1/94).

Rumūz al-Awqāf: Stop Signs

Another useful step taken to facilitate recitation and phonetically correct pronunciation (*tilāwah* and *tajwīd*) was to provide signs with Qur'ānic sentences which could tell the nature of making a stop (breathing) there. These signs are known as the '*rumūz*' (signs) or '*alāmāt*' (symbols) of *awqāf* (stops). Their purpose is to help a person who does not know Arabic to stop at the correct spot during his recitation, and thus, avoid causing a change in meaning by breaking his breath at the wrong spot. Most of these signs were first invented by 'Allamāh Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Tayfūr Sajāwandī, may Allah's mercy be upon him (Al-Nashr fi al-Qira'at al-'Ashr, 1/225). Details about these signs are given below:

⤵ : This letter **Tā'** is an abbreviated form of *al-waqf al-mutlaq*. It means that the statement stands completed at this point. Therefore, it is better to stop here.

ج : This letter **Jīm** is an abbreviation of *al-waqf al-jā'iz* and it means that it is permissible to stop here.

ز : This letter **Zā'** is an abbreviation of *al-waqf al-mujawwaz*. It means that making a stop here is correct all right, but the better choice is not to make a stop here.

ص : This letter **Ṣād** is an abbreviation of *al-waqf al-murakhkhaṣ*. It means that the statement has not yet been completed at this point but, because the sentence has become long, here is the place to breathe and stop rather than do it elsewhere (al-Mianh al-Fikriyyah, p. 63).

م : This letter **mīm** is an abbreviation of *al-waqf al-tāzim*. It means if a stop is not made here an outrageous distortion in the meaning of the verse is possible. So, it is better to stop here. Some phoneticians of the Qur'ān have also called this *al-waqf al-wājib* or the obligatory stop. But this is not '*wājib*' of *fiqh* which brings sin if abandoned. In fact, the purpose is to stress that making a stop here is the most preferable of all stops (al-Nashr, 1/231).

ل : This letter **lā** is an abbreviation of *lā taqif*. It means 'do not

stop here,' but it does not imply that making a stop here is impermissible, because there are certain places bearing this sign where making a stop brings no harm and making an initiation from the following word is also permissible. Therefore, the correct meaning of this sign is: If a stop is made here, it is better to go back and read over again. Initiation from the next word is not approved (al-Nashr, 1/233).

As far as the origin of these signs is concerned, it stands proved beyond doubt that they were invented by 'Allamāh Sajāwandī. In addition to these, there are some other signs as well that appear in the copies of the Qur'ān, for instance:

مع : This *ma'* is an abbreviation of "*mu'ānaqāh*". This symbol is inserted at a place where a single verse has two possible explanations. According to one explanation, the stop will be made at one given place, while according to another explanation, this will be at another place. So, a stop can be made at either one of the two places, but once a stop has been made at one place, it is not correct to stop at the other. For instance, take the verse ذٰلِكَ مَثَلُهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَمَثَلُهُمْ فِي الْاِنْجِيلِ كَزَرْعٍ اَخْرَجَ شَطَاً. If a stop is made here at التَّوْرَةِ, then it is not correct to stop at الْاِنْجِيلِ and should a stop be made at الْاِنْجِيلِ, then it is not correct to stop at التَّوْرَةِ. However, if a stop is not made at both places, that will be correct. It is also known as '*al-muqābalah*'. It was, first of all, pointed out by Imām Abū al-Faḍl al-Rāzī (al-Nashr, 1/237 and al-Itqan, 1/88).

سكته : This is a symbol for *saktah*. It means one should stop here breaking the sound but not the breath. This is generally inserted at a place where assimilated reading is likely to cause an erroneous projection of meaning.

وقفه : At this sign of *waqfah*, one must stop a little longer than *saktah* (pause). But, breath should not break here too.

ق : This letter *qāf* is an abbreviation of *qīla* '*alaihi l'waqf*'. It means that some phoneticans of the Qur'ān identify a stop here while others do not.

قف : This word is '*qif*' which means 'stop' and it is inserted where the reader may possibly think that a stop was not correct there.

على : This is an abbreviation of *al-waṣlu awlā* which means 'it is better to recite in assimilated continuity'.

صل : This is an abbreviation of *qad yuṣalū*, that is, some stop here, while others like to recite on in assimilated continuity.

وقف النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم : This is marked at places where some *ḥadīth* report proves that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم stopped here while reciting.

The printing of the Holy Qur'ān

Before the advent of the printing press, all copies of the Qur'ān were calligraphed by hand, and for this purpose, there always has been, in every age, a large group of calligraphers whose sole purpose in life was nothing else except the calligraphy of the Qur'ān. The amount of hard work put in by Muslims in writing the words of the Qur'ān in ever better styles, and the way they demonstrated their intense emotional involvement with this great Book has a long and interesting history of its own which would need a regular book. This is not the appropriate place to go in such details.

With the invention of the printing press, the noble Qur'ān was first printed at Hamburg in 1113 Hijrah, a copy of which is still present in Dār al-Kutub al-Misīyyah. After that, several orientalists arranged the publication of the copies of Qur'ān but they were not received with much approval in the Muslim world. After that, Mawlay 'Uthmān was the first person among Muslims who had one manuscript of the Qur'ān printed at St. Petersburg, a Russian city, in 1787 A.D. Similarly, another manuscript was printed in Qazān also. In 1828 A.D., the Qur'ān was printed by lithography on stone slabs in the Iranian city of Tehran. After that, printed copies of the Qur'ān became common throughout the world. (Tarikh al-Qur'ān by al-Kurdi, p. 186, and 'Ulum al-Qur'ān by Dr. Subhi Saleh; Urdu Translation by Ghulam Ahmad Hariri, p. 142)

An introduction to the science of *Tafsīr*

Now we can turn to the requisites of *'Ilm al-Tafsīr* or Exegesis. The literal meaning of '*tafsīr*' in the Arabic language is 'to open' or to explain, interpret or comment. Technically, the science of *tafsīr* is a branch of knowledge in which the meanings of the Qur'ān are explained and its injunctions and wisdoms are described openly and clearly (al-Burhan). Addressing the Holy Prophet ﷺ, the Glorious Qur'ān says:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ

We revealed the Qur'ān to you so that you explain to the people what has been sent down to them(16:44).

Once again, the Qur'ān says:

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ

Surely, Allah did a great favour to Muslims when He sent a Messenger to them from among them who would recite His verses before them and purify them and teach them the Book and the Wisdom (3:164).

Keeping this in view, it should be noted that the Holy Prophet ﷺ did not only teach the words of the Qur'ān, but he also explained these in details. This is why, on some occasions, the revered Companions had to devote years together in learning a single Sūrah; details will, *inshallāh*, appear later on.

Until such time that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم graced this mortal world with his presence, seeking the explanation of any verse was not much of a problem. When the Companions faced any difficulty, they would turn to him and get a satisfying answer. But, later on after him, it became necessary that the *tafsīr* of Qur'ān be preserved as a permanent branch of knowledge so that, along with the words of the noble Qur'ān, its correct meaning as well stands protected and conserved for the Muslim *ummah*, and heretics and deviationists find no room there for distortion of its meanings. So, with the grace and *tawfīq* of Allah Almighty, this *ummah* accomplished this wonderful mission with such efficiency that today we can say without any fear of doubt or rejection that not only are the words of this last Book of Allah protected but also stands protected even that correct *tafsīr* and explanation which has reached us through the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his Companions who were ever-prepared to sacrifice their lives for him.

In what ways the Muslim *ummah* protected and preserved the 'ilm (science) of *tafsīr*? What extreme hardships they faced in this pursuit? How many stages did this struggle had to go through? All this has a long and fascinating history which cannot be taken up in the present

context (for this, please see '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*', a detailed work on this subject by this humble writer). The intention here is to state briefly as to what are the sources of Qur'ānic exegesis and how these sources have been utilized in explaining the noble Qur'ān by all those countless books on '*Ilm al-Tafsīr*' available in every language. These sources are six in number:

The Sources of *Tafsīr*

1. The Glorious Qur'ān

The first source of the knowledge of *tafsīr* is the Holy Qur'ān itself. Accordingly, it happens very often that a certain point which is brief and requires explanation is invariably clarified by some other verse of the Qur'ān itself. For instance, there appears that sentence of prayer in the Sūrah al-Fātiḥah: **إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ** that is, 'Guide us in the straight path - the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace...' Now it is not clear here as to who are those whom Allah Almighty has blessed. But, in another verse, they have been identified very clearly where it is said:

فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ
وَالصَّالِحِينَ

So, these are the people whom Allah Almighty has blessed, being the prophets, their true followers, the martyrs (in the way of Allah) and the righteous. (4:69)

Therefore, when respected commentators explain some verse, they first check to see if a *tafsīr* of this verse is already there elsewhere in the noble Qur'ān itself. If it is there, they elect to go by it as their first choice.

2. The *Ḥadīth*

The words and the deeds of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم are called *Ḥadīth*, and as it has been stated earlier, Allah Almighty had sent him with the Qur'ān solely for the purpose that he should explain to people, openly and explicitly, the correct meanings of the noble Qur'ān. Consequently, he discharged this duty with grace and excellence both by his words and deeds. In fact his whole blessed life is, after all, a practical *tafsīr* of Qur'ān. It is for this reason that

respected commentators, in order to understand the Qur'ān, have laid the greatest emphasis on *Ḥadīth* as the second source, and it is in the light of *ahadīth* that they have determined the meanings of the Book of Allah. However, because all sorts of narrations - sound, weak, and fabricated - are included in *Ḥadīth*, therefore research-oriented commentators do not accept a narration as trustworthy until it withstands the principles used in the scrutiny of *Ḥadīth* narrations. Hence, finding a *ḥadīth* report somewhere, looking at it, and then employing it to determine a certain *tafsīr* is not correct, because that report could be weak, even contrary to other stronger reports. This is really a very delicate matter, and venturing therein is the exclusive prerogative of those who have spent their years in mastering these fields of knowledge.

3. The Reports from the *Ṣaḥābah*

The noble *Ṣaḥābah* (Companions), may Allah be pleased with them all, had received their education directly from the Holy Prophet ﷺ. In addition to that, they were personally present on the scene when *Wahy* came, and they had themselves witnessed all circumstances and backgrounds of the revelation of the Qur'ān. Therefore, naturally, the recorded statements of these blessed souls are far more authentic and trustworthy in explaining the noble Qur'ān; the later people cannot take that place. Hence, in the case of verses the explanation of which is not found in the Qur'ān or *Ḥadīth*, statements recorded from the noble Companions are given the highest priority. Consequently, if there is a consensus of Companions on the explanation of a certain verse, the commentators follow just that, and explaining it in any way, other than that, is not permissible. By the way, if the statements of Companions differ in the interpretation (*tafsīr*) of a certain verse, then the commentators who come later examine them in the light of arguments and determine as to which interpretation or explanation can be given preference. In order to handle this situation, there is an important corpus of rules and regulations already codified under the sciences of *Usūl al-Fiqh*, *Usūl al-Ḥadīth* and *Usūl al-Tafsīr* a detailed discussion of which is not appropriate here.

4. The Reports from the *Tābi'īn* or Successors

After Companions (*Ṣaḥābah*) come the Successors (*Tābi'īn*). The later are those who have learnt the *tafsīr* of Qur'ān from the

Companions. Therefore, their statements too have great importance in the science of *tafsīr*, although there exists a difference among scholars whether or not the statements of the *tābi'īn* are decisive evidences in *tafsīr* (al-Itqan, 2/179) but their importance is something which cannot be denied.

5. The Arabic Language

Since the noble Qur'ān was revealed in the Arabic language, therefore, in order to explain the Qur'ān, it is necessary to have a complete mastery over the language. There are several verses of the noble Qur'ān in the background of which there happen to be just no attending circumstances of revelations, or any juristic or scholastic question, therefore, in their *tafsīr* or explanation, the sayings of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم or the statements of the *ṣaḥābah* and *tābi'īn* are not reported. For that reason, the only means through which these can be explained is that of the Arabic language, and it is on the basis of language alone that they are elucidated. Besides that, should there be some difference in the *tafsīr* of a certain verse, then, in that case too, the science of linguistics is used to run a test of veracity between varying opinions.

6. Deliberation and Deduction

The last source of *tafsīr* consists of deliberation and deduction. The subtleties and mysteries of the noble Qur'ān are an ocean with no shore, no end. Therefore, the more a person, who has been blessed with insight into the Islamic sciences by Allah Almighty, deliberates in it, the more he discovers ever-new mysteries and subtleties. As a result of this, commentators do present the outcomes of their respective deliberations as well, but mysteries and subtleties so described are found acceptable only when they do not go against the five sources mentioned above. So, should a person, while explaining the Qur'ān, come out with a subtle point or independent judgment which is contrary to the Qur'ān and Sunnah, Consensus (*Ijmā'*), Language, or the statements of Companions and Successors, or stands in conflict with another principle of Shari'ah, that will then have no credence. Some mystics (رحمهم الله) had started describing such mysteries and subtleties in *tafsīr*, but investigative scholars of the *ummah* did not consider these trustworthy because the personal opinion of any

person against the basic principles of the Qur'ān, Sunnah and Shari'ah has obviously no weight. (al-Itqan, 2/184)

The rules relating to Israelite reports

Judaica or *Isrā'īliyyāt* are narratives which have reached us through Jews and Christians. It may be noted that early commentators used to write down all sorts of narrations which reached them from an identified source. Many of these narrations were straight Judaica. Therefore, it is equally necessary to know what they really are. The reality is that some noble Companions and their Successors first belonged to the religion of the people of the Book, later on when they became Muslims and learnt the Qur'ān, they came across several events relating to past communities in the Qur'ān and which they had also read in the books of their previous religion. Therefore, while referring to the events mentioned in the Qur'ān they would describe other details before Muslims which they had seen in the books of their old religion. These very details have entered into the books of *tafsir* under the name of '*Isrā'īliyyāt*'. Ḥāfiẓ ibn Kathīr, who is one of the authentic research scholars, has written that there are three kinds of '*Isrā'īliyyāt*':

1. Narrations the truth of which is proved from other evidences of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, for instance, the drowning of Pharoah and and the ascent of Sayyidnā Mūsā عليه السلام onto Mount *Tūr* (Sinai).

2. Narrations the falsity of which is proved from other evidences of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, for instance, it appears in Judaic narrations that Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام had become (God forbid) an apostate in his later years. Its refutation is proved from the Qur'ān. It is said there: 'وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَانُ وَلَكِنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ كَفَرُوا': 'It was not Sulaymān who became an infidel, but the devils did become infidels' (2:102). To cite yet another example, it finds mention in Judaic narrations that (God forbid) Sayyidnā Dawūd عليه السلام (David) committed adultery with the wife of his general (Uriah), or, having him killed through all sorts of contrivances, ended up marrying his wife. This too is a blatant lie, and taking such narrations to be false is imperative.

3. Narrations regarding which the Qur'ān, the Sunnah and the Shari'ah are silent, such as the injunctions of Torah etc., are subjects about which silence is to be observed as taught by the Holy Prophet ﷺ

: 'Neither confirm, nor falsify'. There is, however, a difference of opinion among scholars whether or not reporting such narrations is permissible. Hāfiẓ ibn Kathīr has given the decisive word by saying that reporting these is permissible all right but doing so is useless because they cannot be taken as authentic. (Muqaddamah Tafsīr ibn Kathīr)

A misconception about the *tafsir* of Qur'ān

Hopefully, details given above have made it clear that the *tafsīr* (exegesis or interpretation) of the noble Qur'ān is an extremely delicate and difficult undertaking for which getting to know the Arabic language alone is not enough. In fact, it is necessary to have expertise in all related branches of knowledge. Therefore, scholars say that a *mufasssir* or commentator of the Qur'ān must have vast and deep knowledge of the syntax, etymology, rhetoric, and literature of the Arabic language, as well as, that of prophetic Traditions, principles governing jurisprudence and exegesis, doctrinal articles of belief and scholastics. The reason is that one cannot arrive at correct conclusions while explaining the Qur'ān unless there be that adequacy in these fields of knowledge.

It is regrettable that a dangerous epidemic has overtaken Muslims lately whereby many people have started taking the sole reading ability of Arabic sufficient for the *tafsīr* (interpretation) of the Qur'ān. As a result, anyone who gets to read ordinary Arabic starts passing out opinions in the domain of Qur'ānic exegesis. Rather, it has been noticed on occasions that people having just passable familiarity with the Arabic language, and who have yet to master their Arabic to perfection, take it upon themselves to engage in explaining the Qur'ān following their whims, even going to the limit of finding faults with classical commentators. Bad come to worse, there are some subtle tyrants who would, by simply reading the translation, imagine that they have become scholars of the Qur'ān, not even feeling shy of criticising commentators of great stature.

It should be understood very clearly that this is a highly dangerous pattern of behaviour which, in matters of religion, leads to fatal straying. As regards secular arts and sciences, everyone can claim to understand that should a person simply learn the English language and go on to study books of medical science, he would not be

acknowledged as a physician by any reasonable person anywhere in the world, and certainly not trustworthy enough to take care of somebody's life unless he has been educated and trained in a medical college. Therefore, having learnt English is not all one needs to become a doctor.

Similarly, should anyone knowing English hope to become an engineer just by reading through engineering books, it is clear that no sane person in this world would accept him as an engineer. The reason is that this technical expertise cannot be acquired simply by learning the English language. It would, rather, need a formal training in the discipline under the supervision and guidance of expert teachers. When these stringent requirements are inevitable in order to become a doctor or engineer, how can the learning of Arabic language alone become sufficient in matters relating to the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*? In every department of life, everyone knows and acts upon the principle that every art or science has its own particular method of learning and its own peculiar conditions. Unless these are fulfilled, the learner's opinion in given arts and sciences will not be considered trustworthy. If that is so, how can the Qur'ān and the Sunnah become so unclaimed a field of inquiry that there be no need to acquire any art or science in order to explain them, and anyone who so wishes starts passing out opinions in this matter?

Some people say that the Qur'ān has itself stated that: **وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ** : 'And surely We have made the Qur'ān easy for the sake of good counsel.' And since the noble Qur'ān is a simple book, its explanation hardly needs much of a support from any art or science. But this argument is terribly fallacious, which is, in itself, based on lack of intellect and plenty of superficiality. The fact is that the verses of the Qur'ān are of two kinds. Firstly, there are the verses that offer general good counsel, relate lesson-oriented events and introduce subjects dealing with taking of warning and acting on sound advice. Examples of this are the mortality of the world, the accounts of Paradise and Hell, the discourses likely to create the fear of God and the concern for the Hereafter, and other very simple realities of life. Verses of this kind are undoubtedly easy and anyone who knows the Arabic language can benefit from their good counsel by understanding them.

It is in relation to teachings of this kind that, in the verse cited above, it was said that 'We have made them easy'. Hence, the word *لذکر* (for the sake of good counsel) in the verse itself is pointing out towards this meaning.

Contrary to this, the other kind consists of verses which include injunctions, laws, articles of faith and intellectual subjects. Understanding verses of this kind as they should be rightfully understood and deducing and formulating injunctions and rulings from them cannot be done by just any person unless one has the insight and permeating reach into the Islamic areas of knowledge. This is why the noble Companions, whose mother-tongue was Arabic and they did not have to go anywhere to get trained into understanding Arabic, used to spend long periods of time in learning the Qur'ān from the Holy Prophet *صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم*. 'Allamāh al-Suyuti has reported from Imām Abū 'Abd al-Raḥman Sulami that the Companions, who formally learned the Qur'ān from the Holy Prophet *صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم* such as Sayyidnā 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān and 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd and others, have told us that, after having learnt ten verses of the Qur'ān from the Holy Prophet *صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم*, they would not proceed on to the next verses until such time that they had covered all that was intellectually and practically involved in the light of these verses. They used to say:

فَتَعَلَّمْنَا الْقُرْآنَ وَالْعِلْمَ وَالْعَمَلَ جَمِيعًا

We have learnt the Qur'ān, knowledge and action all in one.

(al-Itqan 2/176)

Consequently, as reported in Mu'aṭṭā' of Imām Mālik, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar *رضی اللہ عنہ* spent full eight years memorizing Sūrah al-Baqarah alone and, as in the Musnad of Aḥmad, Sayyidnā Anas *رضی اللہ عنہ* says that 'one of us who would learn Sūrah al-Baqarah and Sūrah 'āl-'Imrān had his status enormously raised among us.' (Ibid)

Worth noticing is the fact that these noble Companions whose mother-tongue was Arabic, who had the highest degree of expertise in poetry and letters and who would have no difficulty in having very long *qaṣīdah* poems perfectly committed to their memories with the least of effort, why would they need, just to memorize the Qur'ān and

understand its meanings, as long a time as eight years, and that too, for mastering one Sūrah? The only reason for this was that proficiency in the Arabic language was not enough to have a learning of the noble Qur'ān and areas of knowledge bearing on it. In order to do that, it was also necessary to seek the benefit of the teaching and the company of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Now this is so obvious that the noble Companions inspite of having an expertise in the Arabic language and notwithstanding their being direct witnesses to the revelation, still needed the process of going through formal education at the feet of the blessed master in order to become the 'alims of the Qur'ān, how then, after all these hundreds of years following the revelation of the Qur'ān, just by cultivating an elementary familiarity with Arabic, or by simply looking at translations, can anyone claim to having become a commentator of the Qur'ān? What a monstrous audacity and what a tragic joke with knowledge and religion! People who opt for such audacity should remember well that the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said:

من قال فى القرآن بغير علم فليتبوا مقعده فى النار

Whoever says anything about the Qur'an without knowledge, then he should make his abode in Hell. (Abu Daw'ud, as in al-Itqan, 2/179)

And he has also said:

من تكلم فى القرآن برأيه فأصاب فقد أخطأ

Whoever talks about the Qur'an on the basis of his opinion, and even if says something true in it, still he made a mistake.

(Abu Daw'ud, Nasa'i)

Famous Commentaries of the Qur'ān

Countless commentaries of the Glorious Qur'ān have been written since the blessed period of the Prophethood. In fact, no other book of the world has been served as much as the noble Qur'ān. Introducing all these commentaries is not possible even in some detailed book, much less in a brief introduction such as this. But, what we wish to do here is to introduce very briefly the major commentaries that have served as particular sources of Ma'ariful Qur'ān and which have been cited there time and again. Although, during the period the above commentary was being written, many commentaries and hundreds of books were constantly referred to, but here, the purpose is to limit the introduction to commentaries the references to which will appear

repeatedly.

Tafsīr ibn Jarīr

The real name of this *Tafsīr* is Jāmi' al-Bayān and it was compiled by 'Allamāh Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (died 310 Hijrah). 'Allamāh Ṭabarī is a highly rated commentator, *muḥaddith* (*ḥadīth* expert) and historian. It is said that he kept writing for forty years continuously and used to write forty pages every day (al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, v. 11, p. 145). There are charges of being *Shi'ah* against him, but researchers have refuted this charge and the truth of the matter is that he is a highly regarded scholar of the followers of the Sunnah, rather one of the *Shi'ite* scholars.

Being in thirty volumes, his *Tafsīr* enjoys the status of a basic source for later commentaries. In his explanation of the verses, he quotes different scholars and then goes on to prove the position which, according to him, is weightier, of course, with arguments and proofs. It must, however, be admitted that narrations of all sorts, sound and weak, have found a place in his commentary. Because of this, not every narration presented by him can be relied upon. In reality, he was aiming through his commentary to collect and compile all narrations that could become available to him, so that this collected material could be put to use later on. Conceded is the fact that he has given the chain of reporters along with each narration so that whoever wishes to investigate into the chain of narrators could do so and decide for himself if the narrations are true or false.

Tāfsīr ibn Kathīr

Ḥāfiẓ 'Imād al-dīn Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī al-Shafī'i (died 774 Hijrah), a distinguished research scholar of the eighth century, is the author of this commentary. It has been published in four volumes. Here emphasis has been laid on explanatory narrations. A special feature is his criticism as *ḥadīth* expert on different narrations, and from this point of view, this book holds a distinct place among all books of *Tafsīr*.

Tafsīr Al-Qurṭubī

Its full name is Al-Jāmi' li-Ahkām al-Qur'ān. It was written by the famous learned writer and research scholar of Andalusia (Spain), Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Abi Bakr ibn Farah al-Qurṭubī

(died 671 Hijrah). He was a follower of the Mālikī school of *fiqh* and was known all over for his *ibādah* and piety. The fact is that the basic objective of this book was to deduce juristic injunctions and rulings from the Qur'ān yet, while doing so, he has also provided the explanation of verses, research into difficult words, discussion of diacritical marks and elegance of style and composition, and related Traditions and Reports in his *Tafsīr*, and quite ably so. This book is in twelve volumes and has been published repeatedly.

Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr

This is the work of Imām Fakhr al-din al-Razi (died 606 Hijrah). Its real name is Mafatih al-Ghayb, but is popularly known as 'Tafsīr Kabīr'. Imām Rāzī is an *imām* of the theology of Islam, therefore, great emphasis has been laid in his *Tafsīr* on rational and scholastic debates and on the refutation of false sects. But, the truth is that this *Tafsīr* is, in its own way, a unique key to the Qur'ān as well. Furthermore, the pleasing way in which the meanings of the Qur'ān have been clarified and the mutual link of the Qur'ānic verses established, is all too praise-worthy. Most likely, Imām Rāzī himself wrote down his *Tafsīr* as far as Sūrah al-Fath. Onwards from there, he could not complete. So, the remaining part of the *Tafsīr*, from Sūrah al-Fath to the end, was completed by Qādī Shihāb al-Din ibn Khalīl al-Khawālī al-Dimashqī (died 639 Hijrah) or Shaykh Najm al-Dīn Ahmad ibn Muḥammad al-Qamūlī (died 777 Hijrah). (Kashaf al-Zunūn v. 2, p. 477)

Imām Rāzī has particularly emphasised scholastic debates and the refutation of false sects in accordance with the dictates of his time, and while doing so, his discussions have become too lengthy at several places, therefore, some people have made the following comment on his *Tafsīr*: *فيه كل شيء الا النفس*: 'There is everything in this (book) except the *Tafsīr*.' But this comment is a terrible injustice to Tafsīr Kabīr. That which is the truth has already been stated above, namely, that this *Tafsīr* enjoys a high rating as far as the resolution of the meanings of the Qur'ān is concerned. But, there are places where he has explained verses of the Qur'ān while moving away from the consensus of the *ummah*, however, such places are very thinly spread out in this book that goes on to eight volumes.

Tafsīr al-Bahr al-Muḥīt

This was written by 'Allāmah Abū Hayyān al-Gharnāṭī al-Andalūsī (died 754 Hijrah) who was a master of syntax and rhetoric in addition to other Islamic fields of learning. As a result of this, his own *Tafsīr* is soaked in syntax and rhetoric. He places special stress on investigating into the words of every verse, the difference in structures and on points of eloquence.

Aḥkām al-Qur'ān by al-Jaṣṣāṣ

This was written by Imām Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ al-Rāzī (died 370 Hijrah) who occupies a distinguished place among Hanafi jurists. The deduction of juristic injunctions and rulings from the noble Qur'ān is the subject of this book. Instead of explaining verses in serial continuity, he has taken up the juristic details as called for by verses which consist of juristic injunctions. Several other books have also been written on this subject, but this book enjoys a prominent place among those.

Tafsīr al-Durr al-Manthūr

This was written by 'Allāmah Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (died 910 Hijrah). Its full name is 'al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi l'Ma'thūr.' Here 'Allāmah al-Suyūṭī has tried to collect all narrations about the *tafsīr* of Qur'ān he was able to find. Several *ḥadīth* scholars such as Hāfiz ibn Jarīr, Imām Baghawi, Ibn Mardūwayh, Ibn Hibbān and Ibn Mājah and others had already worked in this area on their own. 'Allāmah al-Suyūṭī has assembled narrations presented by all of them in this book. But, rather than refer to complete chain of authorities along with narrations, he has found it sufficient to simply name the particular author who has presented that narration under his authority so that, if needed, one could go back to the work and investigate into the ultimate authority. Since his purpose was to put together a mass of narrations, as a result of which, all sorts of narrations, sound and weak, have found their way into his book. Hence, every narration allowed entry by him cannot be considered reliable without investigation into its authority. There are occasions when 'Allāmah al-Suyūṭī does indicate with each narration the degree of its authority as well. But, as he is known to be fairly easy-going in respect of *ḥadīth* critique, it is still difficult to fully rely on that too.

Al-Tafsīr al-Mazhari

This was written by Qādi Thanāullah Pānīpatī (died 1225 Hijrah). He has named this *Tafsīr* as 'Al-Tafsīr al-Mazhari' after the name of his spiritual master, Mirzā Mazhar Jān-e-Jānān Dehlavī. This *Tafsīr* of his is very simple and clear, and extremely useful to locate brief explanations of Qur'ānic verses. Along with the elucidation of Qur'ānic words, he has also taken up related narrations in ample details, and in doing so, he has made an effort to accept narrations after much more scrutiny as compared with other commentaries.

Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī

The full name of this *Tafsīr* is 'Ruh al-Ma'ani fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azim wa al-Sab' al-Mathani' and it was written by 'Allāmah Maḥmud al-Ālūsī (died 1270 Hijrah), the famous scholar of the last period of Baghdad, and comprises of thirty volumes. He has made his best possible effort to make this *Tafsīr* comprehensive. There are exhaustive discussions on language, syntax, letters, style, and on jurisprudence, articles of faith, scholastics, philosophy, astronomy, mysticism and related narratives of Traditions. He has made an attempt to leave no intellectual aspect pertaining to a verse unexplained. In the case of *ḥadīth* narratives as well, the author of this work has been more cautious as compared to other commentators. From this angle, this is a very comprehensive commentary, and no future venture in connection with the Tafsir of the Qur'ān can now afford to ignore its help.



AL-FĀTIHAH

(The Opening)

This Sūrah is Makkan, and comprises of seven verses

The Merits and Peculiarities of the Sūrah

This Sūrah (Chapter) of the Holy Qur'ān possesses a number of merits peculiar to it. Firstly, the Holy Qur'ān begins with it; the prescribed prayer begins with it; and even in the order of revelation this is the first Surah which was revealed to the Holy Prophet ﷺ in its complete form. Some verses of the Sūrahs Iqra' (al-'Alaq), al-Muzzammil and al-Muddaththir had no doubt been revealed earlier, but the first Sūrah to be revealed in a complete form is no other than this. Certain Companions of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم have reported that this was the first Sūrah to be revealed. Most probably they had meant that no Sūrah had been revealed in a complete form before this. Perhaps that is why the Sūrah has been named as *'Fātihatul-Kitāb'* (The Opening of the Book).

The other important peculiarity of the Sūrah is that it is, so to say, the quintessence of the Holy Qur'ān, and the rest of the Qur'ān is its elaboration. The Sūrah may thus be delineated for two reasons. Firstly, all that the Holy Qur'ān has to say is, in one way or another, related to either of the two themes, faith (*Īmān*) and virtuous deeds (*al-'amal al-salih*), and the basic principles of the two have been

indicated in this Sūrah (See Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī and Rūḥ al-Bayān). That is why authentic Traditions (*Aḥādīth*) give to this Sūrah such titles as "*Umm al-Qur'ān*" (Essence of the Qur'ān), "*Umm al-Kitāb*" (Essence of the Book), "*Al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*" (Glorious Qur'ān).

Secondly, this Sūrah gives a special instruction to the man who begins the recitation or the study of the Qur'ān – that he should approach this book with a mind cleansed of all his previous thoughts and opinions, seeking nothing but the Truth and the right path, praying to Allah for being guided in the right path. The Sūrah begins with the praise of Him before whom the request is to be submitted, and ends with the request for guidance. The whole of the Qur'ān is the answer to this request. The answer begins with the words: "*Alif Lām Mīm*. This is the Book", which is an indication that the guidance man had prayed for has been provided in this Book.

The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said, "I swear by Allah who is the master of my life, neither the Torah, nor the Evangile nor the Psalms of David have anything to compare with the Opening Chapter of the Qur'ān, and no other Chapter of the Qur'ān itself can compare with it." (Reported by the Companion Abū Hurairah رضى الله عنه).

The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has also said that this Sūrah is a cure for all kinds of illnesses. According to another Tradition (*Ḥadīth*), the Sūrah has also been named the "Cure" (*Al-Shifā*), (See Qurtūbī), and al-Bukhārī reports from the Companion Anas that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has called this Sūrah the greatest among all the Sūrahs of the Holy Qur'ān. (See Qurtūbī)

﴿بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ﴾

(I begin) with the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful.

***Bismillāh* is a verse of the Holy Qur'ān**

There is consensus of all the Muslims on the fact that *Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* is a verse of the Holy Qur'ān, being a part of the Sūrah al-Naml (The Ant); and there is also an agreement on that this

verse is written at the head of every Sūrah except the Sūrah al-Taubah. But there is a difference of opinion among the *Mujtāhids* (the authentic scholars who are entitled to express an opinion in such matters) as to whether this verse is an integral part of the Sūrah al-Fatihah or of all the Sūrahs or not. According to the great Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, it is not an integral part of any Sūrah except al-Naml, rather it is in itself an independent verse of the Holy Qur'ān which has been revealed for being placed at the beginning of every Surah in order to separate and distinguish one Sūrah from another.

The merits of *Bismillāh*

It was a custom in the Age of Ignorance (*Jāhiliyyah*) before the advent of Islam that people began everything they did with the names of their idols or gods. It was to eradicate this practice that the first verse of the Holy Qur'ān which the Archangel Jibrā'il brought down to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم commanded him to begin the Qur'ān with the name of Allah اِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ: "Read with the name of your Lord."

The famous commentator al-Suyuti says that beside the Holy Qur'ān all the other divine books too begin with *Bismillāh*. Certain other scholars are of the opinion that *Bismillāh Al-Raḥmān Al-Raḥīm* is peculiar to the Qur'ān and to the followers of Muḥammad ﷺ. The two views can be brought into agreement with each other if we say that all the divine books share the common trait of beginning with the name of Allah, but the words *Bismillāh Al-Raḥmān Al-Raḥīm* are peculiar to the Holy Qur'ān, as is evident from certain Traditions (*Aḥādīth*) which report that in order to begin with the name of Allah anything he undertook, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم used to say the words بِاسْمِكَ اللَّهُمَّ (*Bismikā Allāhumma*), but when the verse *Bismillah Al-Raḥman Al-Rahim* was revealed, he adopted these words. Since then this practice was established through the verbal command of the Holy Prophet ﷺ or through his act or tacit approval). (See Qurṭubī and Rūh al-Ma'ānī)

The Holy Qur'ān again and again instructs us to begin what we do with the name of Allah. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said that no important work receives the blessings of Allah, unless it is begun

with His name. According to yet another *ḥadīth* (Tradition), closing the door of one's house, putting out the lamp, covering a vessel, should all be done with the recitation of *Bismillāh*. The Holy Qur'ān and the *aḥādīth* (Traditions) repeatedly instruct us to recite this verse while taking food, drinking water, performing the *wudū* (ablution), getting on a carriage or getting down from it. (See *Qurtubī*)

By instructing man to begin everything with the name of Allah, Islam has given to the whole of his life an orientation towards Allah so that he may, with each step he takes, renew his allegiance to the covenant with Allah that nothing he does, not even his very being can come into existence without the will and the help of Allah. Thus, all the economic and worldly activities of man, each movement and gesture becomes transformed into an act of worship.¹ How brief is the action, which consumes neither time nor energy, and yet how immense is the gain -- it is a regular alchemy, transmuting the profane (*dunyā*) into the sacred (*dīn*); a disbeliever eats and drinks just as a Muslim does but in saying '*Bismillāh*' as he begins to eat, the Muslim affirms that it was not in his power to obtain this little morsel of food which has passed through innumerable stages from the sowing of the seed to the reaping of the grain corn, and which has during this process required the labours of the wind, the rain, the sun, of the heavens and of the earth, and of a thousand men -- and that it is Allah alone who has granted him this morsel of food or this draught of water by making it go through all these stages. A disbeliever goes to sleep, wakes up and goes about as much as a Muslim. But while going to sleep or waking up, the Muslim mentions the name of Allah, renewing his relationship with Him. Thus his economic and worldly needs and activities acquire the nature of the remembrance of Allah, and are counted as acts of worship. Similarly, in saying '*Bismillāh*' while getting on to a carriage, the Muslim testifies to the fact that it is beyond the power of man to produce this carriage and to procure it for him, and that it is only the infallible and divinely-created order of

1. This is the only way in which human life can, to use a word dear to modern cultural anthropology, be sacralized in any meaningful sense of the term -- Translator

things that has brought together from all the corners of the world the wood, the steel and other metals which have gone into the making of the carriage, as well as the mechanics who have given a particular shape to these components, and the driver -- and finally put all these into the service of man who can make use of the labour of this army of the creatures of man who can God by spending a few coins. And even these coins have not been created by him, it is Allah himself who has provided the complex ways and means of earning them. Veritably, '*Bismillāh*' is the legendary philosopher's stone which transmutes, not copper, but mere dust into the purest of gold. **فَلِلّٰهِ الْحَمْدُ عَلَىٰ دِينِ الْاِسْلَامِ وَتَعْلِيْقَاتِهِ** : 'So then, praised be Allah for the religion of Islam and its teachings.'

Ruling

'Before beginning to recite the Qur'ān, it is *sunnah* to first say **أَعُوْذُ بِاللّٰهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطٰنِ الرَّجِيْمِ** (I seek refuge with Allah from Satan -- the accursed) and then **بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ** (I begin with the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful). And during the *tilāwah* (the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān) as well, saying **بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ** : '*Bismillah*... at the beginning of each Sūrah, except the Sūrah Al-Bara'ah (al-Taūbah), is *Sunnah*.

Commentary

'*Bismillāh*': This phrase is composed of three words -- the letter '*Bā*', '*Ism*' and '*Allah*'. The preposition '*Ba*' has several connotations in Arabic, three of which are appropriate to the occasion. All the three are applicable here: (1) Contiguity, or the close proximity between one thing and the other; (2) Seeking the aid of someone or something; (3) To seek the blessings of someone.

The word '*Ism*' has many lexical and intellectual nuances of meaning, the knowledge of which would not be essential for the average reader. It is sufficient to know that this word is translated in English as 'Name'.

The word, '*Allah*' is the greatest and the most comprehensive of the divine names. According to some scholars, it is the 'Great Name', or '*Al-Ism al-Ā'zam*'. (According to the Tradition (*Ḥadīth*), the Great Name carries with it such a benediction that a prayer is granted when this word has been uttered. Reports differ as to what this Great Name

is). The word 'Allah' refers to the Essence, and hence this name cannot be given to anyone except Allah. That is why this word has neither a plural nor a dual, for Allah is One and has no associate. In short, Allah is the name of that Ultimate Reality which comprehends in Itself all the attributes of perfection, which is the creator and sustainer, unique and peerless.

Thus, the phrase '*Bismillāh*' has these three respective significations according to the three connotations of the preposition 'Ba':

- (a) With the name of Allah
- (b) With the help of the name of Allah
- (c) With the *barakah* or benediction of the name of Allah.

But, in all the three forms, the phrase obviously remains incomplete unless one mentions the work which one intends to begin with the name of Allah or with its help or benediction. So, according to the rules of grammar, some verb is taken to be understood here which should be suitable for the occasion -- e.g., 'I begin or recite with the name of Allah.' Propriety demands that even this verb should be understood to occur after the phrase, so that one does actually begin with the name of Allah and the verb does not precede His name. The preposition '*Bā*' has, however, to be placed before the name of Allah, for it is an exigency of the Arabic language. But even in this respect the 'Uthmāni manuscript of the Holy Qur'an prepared by the third Caliph 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه has made the necessary modification in accordance with the consensus of the Companions of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. The regular Arabic script requires the letter '*Bā*' here to be joined with the letter '*Alif*', producing this shape -- بِاسْمِ اللَّهِ. But the 'Uthmani manuscript has dropped the '*Alif*', and joined the letter '*Bā*' with the letter '*Sīn*', making the '*Bā*' look like a part of the word '*Ism*', so that the beginning is made, in effect, with the name of Allah. That is why the letter '*Alif*' is not dropped in other combinations between the preposition '*Bā*' and the noun '*Ism*' -- for example, in the verse اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ (Iqrā' biismi Rabbik), the '*Alif*' is written along with the '*Bā*'. It is the peculiarity of '*Bismillāh*' alone that the letter '*Ba*' has been joined with the letter '*Sin*'.

Merciful) -- these two are the attributes of Allah Almighty. '*Raḥmān*' signifies one whose mercy is common to all, and extends to the whole universe, to everything that will be created in the future. On the other hand, '*Raḥīm*' signifies one whose mercy is perfect in all possible ways. That is why '*Raḥmān*' is the exclusive attribute of Allah and the word is employed only when one is referring to Him. It is not permissible to qualify any created being as '*Raḥmān*', for there cannot possibly be anyone else, beside Allah, whose mercy should be all-embracing and all-inclusive. Just like the word 'Allah', there is no dual or plural for the word '*Raḥmān*' too, because these words are in their signification exclusive to the One and Absolute Being which does not permit the existence of a second or a third. (Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī) The signification of the word '*Rahim*', on the contrary, does not contain anything which it should be impossible to find in a created being, for a man may be perfectly merciful in his dealings with another man. So, the word '*Rahim*' may justifiably be employed in the case of a human being -- as the Qur'ān itself has used the word in speaking of the Holy Prophet ﷺ which is: بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَؤُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ (He is gentle and very merciful towards the Muslims).

Ruling: This would easily show that those who shorten names such as 'Abd al-Raḥmān or Fadl al-Rahman into '*Raḥmān*' are doing what is not permissible and are thus committing a sin.

Out of the 'Beautiful Names' (الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى : *Al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā*) of Allah Almighty and His attributes of perfection, only two have been mentioned in this verse - namely, '*al-Raḥmān*' and '*al-Raḥīm*' -, and both have been derived from the root '*Rahmah*' (mercy), indicating the all-pervasiveness and perfection of divine mercy. It points to the fact that the creation of the heavens and the earth and the sustenance of the whole universe has no other motivation than making manifest Allah's quality of mercy. He Himself had no need of these things, nor could anyone compel Him to create them. It is His own mercy which has required the creation and sustenance of the whole universal order.

How aptly this was put in Persian by poet *Rūmī*:

مانبودیم و تقاضا ما نبود
لطف تو ناگفته مامی شنود

There was nothing -- neither our being nor our claim to be;
It was Thy mercy that heard our unsaid.

Injunctions and related considerations

The Holy Qur'an says: **فَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ**: 'When you recite the Qur'an, seek the protection of Allah against Satan, the rejected one'.

According to the consensus of *Ummah*, it is a *Sunnah* to say *ta'awwudh*: **أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ** 'before the recitation of the Holy Qur'an whether in *Salāh* or out of *Salāh* (*Sharah al-munyah*). Saying *ta'awwudh* is peculiar to the recitation of the Holy Qur'an. Therefore, with the exception of *tilawah*, all other chores should be taken up by first saying '*Bismillāh*' only. Saying *ta'awwudh* is not a *sunnah* there. (Alamgiri, Chapter 4 - Al-Karahiyah)

One should begin the recitation of the Qur'an by reciting both **أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ** (I seek the protection of Allah) and **بِسْمِ اللَّهِ** (*Bismillāhi*: I begin with the name of Allah). During the recitation, one should repeat '*Bismillāh*', but not '*A'udhubillāh*', when one comes to the end of a *Sūrah* (or Chapter) and begins the next *Sūrah* -- with the sole exception of the *Sūrah* '*Al-Bara'ah*' (**الْبَرَاءَةُ**). If one comes upon this particular *Sūrah* in the course of the recitation, one should not say '*Bismillāh*' before reading it. But if one happens to begin the recitation of the Holy Qur'an with this *Sūrah*, one should recite '*A'udhubillāh*' and '*Bismillāh*' both (Alamgiri from Al-Muḥīṭ).

'*Bismillāh al-Rahmān al-Rahim*' is a verse of the Holy Qur'an and a part of the verse in *Sūrah* '*al-Naml*'; it is also a regular verse when it occurs between two *Sūrahs*. It must, therefore, be treated with as much respect as the Holy Qur'an itself, and it is not permissible to touch it without having performed *wudu* (ablution). In the state of major ritual impurity (e.g., after the emission of semen, or during menstruation, or after child-birth), it is not allowed to even read this verse as recitation of the Holy Qur'an before having taken a ritual bath. One may, however, recite it as a form of prayer before beginning a work, like taking one's meals or drinking water under all conditions.

Rulings:

(1) It is a *Sunnah* to recite '*Bismillāh*' after '*A'udhū-billāh*' at the very beginning of the first *raka'ah* in the *salāh*. But views differ as to whether it should be recited in a loud or a low voice. Īmām Abū

Hanifah and certain other Imāms prefer it to be done in a low voice. There is a consensus on the point that '*Bismillāh*' should be recited at the beginning of all the succeeding *raka'ahs* too. This is unanimously considered to be a *Sunnah*; however, in some narrations, the reciting of '*Bismillāh*' at the beginning of every *raka'ah* has been identified as *wajib* or necessary.

(2) In the course of *salāh*, whether one is reciting the Holy Qur'ān loudly or silently, one should not recite '*Bismillāh*' before beginning a Sūrah just after the Sūrah 'Fatihah'. Such a practice has not been reported either from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم or from any of the first four *Khulafā'*. According to *Sharh al-munyah*, this is the view of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah and of Imām Abu Yusuf, and *Shrah al-munyah*, al-Durr al-Mukhtar, al-Burhan etc. prefer it to other views. But Imām Muḥammad considers it to be preferable that one should recite '*Bismillah*' if one is reciting the Holy Qur'ān in a *salāh* offered silently. Certain reports attribute this view even to Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, and al-Shāmi has quoted some Muslim jurists in support of this view, -- which has been adopted even in 'Bahishti Zewar' of Maulanā Thānavi. Anyhow, there is a complete agreement among the scholars that it is not *makrūh* or reprehensible for some one to recite '*Bismillāh*' in this situation.



SURAH AL - FATIHAH

(The Opening)

MAKKAN

VERSES: 7

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ٥

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ٥ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ٥ مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ٥
إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ٥ اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ٥
صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا
الضَّالِّينَ ٥

With the name of Allah,
the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful.

Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful, the Master of the Day of Judgment. You alone we worship, and from You alone we seek help. Guide us in the straight path -- the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace, not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.

This Sūrah comprises seven verses. Of these, the first three are in praise of Allah, while the last three contain a request or a prayer on the part of man, which Allah himself has, in His infinite mercy, taught him. The verse in between the two sets has both the features -- there is an aspect of praise, and another of prayer.

The Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim reports from the blessed Companion Abū Hurayrah a ḥadīth (Tradition) of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم : "Allah has said, 'The *salāh* (i.e., the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah) is equally

divided between Me and My servant. And My servant shall be given what he prays for." The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم continued: "When the servant says:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds,

Allah says: "My servant has paid his homage to Me." When he says:

الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ

The All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful,

Allah says: "My servant has praised Me." When the servant says:

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

The Master of the Day of Judgment,

Allah says, "My servant has proclaimed my greatness." When the servant says:

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

You alone we worship, and to You alone we pray for help,

Allah says, "This verse is common to Me and My servant. He shall be given what he has prayed for." When the servant says:

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

Guide us in the straight path...,

Allah says: "All this is there for My servant. He shall be given what he prays for." (Mazhari)

The Sūrah begins with the words *Al-hamdulillāh*, signifying that all praise essentially belongs to Allah. Whosoever praises anything anywhere in the world is ultimately praising Allah. The sensible world contains millions of things which compel man's attention and admiration for their beauty and usefulness, but if one tries to look behind the veil of appearances, one would find in each and every thing the manifestation of the same creative power. Admiring anything that exists in the created world is no more than showing one's admiration

for a work of art or craft, which in fact is a praise of the artist or the craftsman. This small statement of the Holy Qur'ān opens a new perspective for man lost in the labyrinth of multiplicity, and shows him how the many are knit together in the same unity, and how all praise in reality belongs to One whose power is absolute, and that it is only in our ignorance or indifference that we regard this praise to be due to anyone else.

If there is only one Being in the whole universe who inherently deserves all praise, it necessarily follows from it that this Being alone should be worthy of adoration and worship. Thus we can see that although the phrase, *Al-hamdulillāh*, has been used to signify praise, yet, by implication, it cuts the very root of polytheism or the worship of created beings, and at the same time brings out in a self-evident manner the first and the basic principle of the Islamic creed -- Oneness of God.

The next phrase to follow in the Sūrah speaks of an attribute of Allah -- Lord of the Worlds. Lexically, the word, *Rabb* signifies 'one who nurtures'. And 'nurture' implies developing a thing by gradual stages in a manner which is conducive to its own good till it attains perfection. The word, *Rabb* is exclusive to the sacred Being of Allah, and cannot be employed in the case of any created being without adding some qualification, for a created being is itself in need of 'nurture', and cannot nurture anyone else.

Al-'alāmin is the plural of *'alam* (world, universe, kingdom). "The worlds" include all possible forms of -- existence: the sky, the earth, the sun, the moon, stars, wind and rain, the angels, the jinns, animals, plants, minerals, and, of course, men. So, 'the Lord of all the worlds' means that Allah alone gives nurture to all the forms of existents that are to be found in this universe, or in the millions of universes that may lie beyond our own universe in the outer space. Imām Rāzī, the great commentator of the Holy Qur'ān, says that the existence of an indefinite space beyond our universe can be proved on the basis of rational argument, and it is also certain that Allah is All-Powerful, so it should not be at all difficult for Him to have created millions of other universes in this endless space. It has been reported from the Companion Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه that there are forty thousand

worlds; our world, stretching from the East to the West, is only one of them, there being many more besides it. According to the well-known commentator *Muqatil*, the number of worlds is eighty thousand. (See Qurtubi)

As for the objection that no man or animal can live in the outer space owing to the lack of the kind of air which should be compatible with the physical make-up of man, Imām Rāzī replies that the inhabitants of the worlds in the outer space need not necessarily have the same physical make-up as that of the inhabitants of our world which should make existence in space impossible for them, and suggests that their organic composition and the requirements for its nourishment and sustenance might just be totally different.

Imām Rāzī postulated these possibilities some eight hundred years ago without the help of the modern facilities for observation and exploration, yet the speculations of the scientists in the age of space travel endorse his view.

Seen in the light of this short phrase, 'Lord of the worlds', the universe reveals itself to be an incredibly complex, yet perfectly integrated order. From the heavens to the earth, from the planets and the stars to the particles of dust, everything is bound in a chain of being, and is performing the function assigned to it by Divine Wisdom. Man cannot obtain a little morsel of food unless a thousand forces of the sky and the earth work together to produce it. The universal order is there for man to contemplate, and to realize that, if Allah has put millions of His creatures in the service of man, man in his turn cannot be worthless or purposeless or meaningless.² The Holy Qur'ān is indeed very explicit and very insistent in reminding us that the universe is not absurd:

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاءَ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا بَاطِلًا ذَلِكَ ظَنُّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَوَيْلٌ
لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنَ النَّارِ

We have not created in vain the heavens and the earth and what lies between them. That is the fancy of the disbelievers. But woe to the disbelievers in the fire of Hell. (38:27)

2. As do proclaim the current Western philosophies of the Absurd and of Unreason.

If the universe is not in vain or absurd, man too, whose purposes the universe has been made to serve, cannot be purposeless and meaningless. The Holy Qur'ān defines the Divine purpose in creating man and the goal of his existence in these words.

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

I have not created the jinn and mankind except to worship Me. (51:56)

It may be said that the phrase 'the Lord of all the worlds' is in a way the proof of the claim made in the earlier phrase الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ : (all praise belongs to Allah). When Allah alone is the ultimate cause for the nurture of the whole universe, He alone can, in reality, be worthy of praise. Thus, the first verse of the Surah, as we said before, combines in itself the praise of Allah and a subtle indication of the first and basic principle of the Islamic creed -- the oneness of God.

The second verse speaks of the Divine quality of mercy, employing two adjectives *Rahmān* and *Rahīm*, both of which are hyperbolic terms in Arabic, and respectively connote the superabundance and perfection of Divine mercy. The reference to this particular attribute in this situation is perhaps intended to be a reminder of the fact that it is not through any external compulsion or inner need or any kind of necessity whatsoever that Allah has assumed the responsibility of nurturing the whole of His creation, but in response to the demand of His own quality of mercy. If this whole universe did not exist, He would suffer no loss; if it does exist, it is no burden to Him.

The third verse pays homage to Allah as 'the Master of the Day of Judgment or Requital': مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ. The word *Mālik* has been derived from the root, '*mil*k' (ملك) which signifies possessing a thing in such a manner that one has the right and power to dispose of it as one likes (See Qamus). The word *Dīn* signifies 'Requital'. So, the phrase 'Master of the Day of Requital' implies total mastery on the Day of Requital. But there is no mention of the thing or things to which this mastery or possession would apply. According to the commentary, '*al-Kashshaf*', the phrase makes a general reference to cover everything. That is to say, on the Day of Requital the mastery over everything that exists will belong to Allah alone.

The Day of Requit is real and rational:

Before we proceed, let us consider two important questions: Firstly, what is this Day of Requit? Secondly, Allah being the Master, of everything even today as much as on the Day of Requit, why does this verse specifically mention the Day of Requit? The Day of Requit or the Day of Judgment is the Day appointed by Allah to recompense good or evil deeds.³ The world is only the field of action, the place where one is required to perform one's duty, and not the place for receiving one's reward. The mere fact that man happens to be healthy and wealthy or powerful does not necessarily argue that he has won the pleasure and favour of Allah. Similarly, the mere fact that a man happens to be ill or poor or weak or miserable does not by itself indicate that he is the object of Allah's wrath. Even in the case of worldly life, would it not be a platitude to remark that a man sweating in a factory or an office does not consider it a misfortune? In fact, try to deprive him of this opportunity to sweat, and you would have earned his deepest displeasure; for beyond all this toil he can glimpse the reward he is going to get after thirty days in the shape of his wages.

It proceeds from this principle that the greatest sufferings in this world are the lot of the Prophets عليهم السلام and, after them, of the men of Allah, and yet we see them quite content and even happy. In short, physical well-being or worldly glory or luxury is no sure indication of one's virtue and truthfulness, nor is sorrow and suffering that of one's misdeeds and falsity. It may, however, happen that a man receives some punishment or reward for his deeds in this world. This never is the full recompense, but only a faint model which has been manifested to serve as an intimation or warning. The Holy Qur'an has spoken very clearly on this point:

وَلَنَذِيقَنَّهُمْ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَدْنَىٰ دُونَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَكْبَرِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

And We shall surely let them taste a nearer punishment (in

3. The verse qualifies Allah specifically as 'Master of the Day of Requit', and thus emphasizes a principle which is in itself of the highest import, and is particularly relevant to certain tendencies in the modern habits of thought. Contrary to the modern conviction which one finds reflected even in the so called "new interpretations" of Islam, individual or collective well being is not the be-all and end-all of human existence, nor is the physical world the place where good or evil deeds are recompensed -- Translator

this world) before the greater punishment (in the other world), so that they may return (to the right path). (32:21)

كَذَٰلِكَ الْعَذَابُ وَالْعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةُ أَكْبَرُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

Such is the punishment; and the punishment of the other world is certainly greater, only if they knew. (68 : 33)

The sufferings of this world, as even its joys, are sometimes a trial, and sometimes a punishment, but never a full recompense, for the world is itself transitory. What really counts is the joy or suffering that will endure for ever, and which one will come to know in the other world beyond this world. Given the fact that good or evil deeds are not fully recompensed in this world, and the rational and just principle that good and evil not being equal in value, every deed should be rewarded or punished according to its nature, it readily follows that beyond this world there should be another world where every deed, big or small, good or evil, is to be judged, and then justly rewarded or punished. This the Holy Qur'an calls *Al-Akhirah*: الآخرة (The world-to-come), or *Al-Qiyamah*: القيامة (Doomsday or the Day of Judgment), or *'Yawm al-din*, (Day of Requital). The whole idea has been explained by the Holy Qur'an itself:

مَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَلَا الْمُسِيءُ قَلِيلًا
مَّا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ ۚ إِنَّ السَّاعَةَ لَأَتِيَةٌ لِأَرْبَابٍ فِيهَا، وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ۝

The blind are not equal with the seeing, nor the wrong-doers with those who believe and do good deeds. Yet you seldom reflect. The hour of retribution is sure to come, no doubt about it, yet most people do not believe. (40 : 58-59)

Who is the Master ?

Now, we come to the second question. It should be obvious, on a little reflection, to everyone that the real master of every particle of dust in the universe can only be He who has created and nurtured it, Whose mastery over everything is complete, having neither a beginning nor an end, covering the living and the dead, the apparent and the hidden, the seen and the unseen. On the contrary, the mastery of man is delimited by a beginning and an end; it has a 'before' when it did not exist, and an 'after' when it will exist no more. Man's mastery and control extends to the living, not to the dead, to the seen, not to

the unseen, to the external aspect of things, not to the internal. All this would show to those who can see that the real Master of the whole universe, not only on the Day of Requitul but even in this world, is no other than Allah. Then why should this verse specify the Day of Requitul ?

The verses of the Sūrah al-Mū'min / Ghafīr (Chapter 40) serve as a commentary on the phrase under discussion, and provide a clear account of the Day of Requitul. The real and complete mastery over everything, no doubt, belongs to Allah alone even in this world. Yet Allah Himself, in His beneficence and wisdom, has granted a kind of imperfect, temporary and apparent mastery to man as well; and the *Shari'ah*, in laying down laws for worldly affairs, has given due consideration to man's limited right to ownership. But today, in possessing lands or money or power, which has been given to him by way of trial, man has always been prone to get drunk with pride and vanity.⁴ The phrase 'Master of the Day of Judgment' is a warning to man reeling in his forgetfulness and self-conceit, and an intimation that all his possessions, all his relationships with things and men are only short-lived, and that there shall come a Day when masters will no more be masters and slaves no more slaves, when no one will own anything even in appearance, and the ownership and mastery, apparent as well as real, of the whole universe will be seen to belong to none but Allah, the Exalted. The Holy Qur'an says:

يَوْمَ هُمْ بَارِزُونَ لَا يَخْفَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ مِنْهُمْ شَيْءٌ لِّمَنِ الْمُلْكُ الْيَوْمَ لِلَّهِ الْوَاحِدِ
الْقَهَّارِ الْيَوْمَ يُجْزَىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ لَا ظُلْمَ الْيَوْمَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ

The day they will present themselves (before Allah), and nothing of theirs will remain hidden from Allah (even apparently). 'Whose is the kingdom today?' Of Allah alone, the One, the Mighty. Today everyone will be recompensed for what he has done. Today no one will be wronged. Allah's reckoning is surely swift. (40:17)

The fourth verse اِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَ اِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ : 'You alone we worship, and from You alone we seek help' has a double aspect, one of praise and

4. Specially the modern man living in the so-called 'humanistic civilization' when the sole drive and motivating force is the complacent belief in man's mastery.

another of prayer. A man's life is subject to three states of time -- past, present and future.

The first two verses of the Sūrah, اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ (All Praise belongs to Allah) and اَلرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ (the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful), remind man that, as far as his past and present are concerned, he owes everything to Allah alone, for it is Allah who created him out of nothing, endowed him with the best form in the universe, and with reason and intuition, and continues to sustain and nurture him in the present. The third verse: مٰلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ (Master of the Day of Judgment) tells him that in the future too he will have to depend on Allah alone, for on the Day of Requital one cannot possibly have a helper other than Allah. The three verses having made it clear that man is totally and absolutely dependent on Allah in all the three states of his life, it logically and naturally leads to the conclusion that Allah alone is worthy of being worshipped, for in Arabic the word *'ibādah* (worship) connotes showing the utmost humility and submissiveness out of an intense respect and love for someone, and such an attitude of willing self-abasement cannot justly be adopted towards anyone except Allah. So, the phrase: اِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ (You alone we worship) expresses this very natural and logical conclusion. And once it has been understood that there is only one Being who can satisfy all our needs, it is equally natural and logical to turn for help in everything to Him alone. Hence the phrase اِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِيْظُ (to You alone we pray for help). Beside these two aspects, the fourth verse has another dimension as well. It teaches man not to worship anyone except Allah, not to consider anyone else as being really capable of satisfying his needs, and not to beg anyone else to satisfy these needs. It does not, however, go against this principle if, in praying to Allah, one mentions the name of a prophet or a man of Allah by way of a medium (*wasilāh*) for drawing the mercy of Allah upon oneself.

It may also be noticed that the phrase: اِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِيْظُ (to You alone we pray for help) does not mention the purpose for which help is being sought. According to most of the commentators, it generalizes the idea of the request to cover everything from acts of worship to all possible worldly or other-worldly concerns.

Then, acts of worship (*'Ibādah*) are not limited merely to prescribed prayers or fasting. Imām al-Ghāzzālī in his book 'Arba'in' has enumerated ten forms which worship can take:-

1. Prayers.
2. Prescribed Alms-giving.
3. Fasting.
4. Hajj or pilgrimage to Makkah.
5. Reciting the Holy Qur'an.
6. Remembrance of Allah in all possible situations.
7. Earning one's livelihood in accordance with the regulations of the *Shari'ah*.
8. Fulfilling one's obligations towards one's companions and neighbours.
9. Persuading people to act righteously and dissuading them from what is reprehensible and forbidden.
10. To follow the *Sunnah*, or the practice of the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

Therefore, not associating anyone with Allah in worship means that one should not love or fear or depend on anyone else as one loves or fears or depends on Allah, nor should one repose one's hope in anyone else, nor should one consider obedience or submission or service to another as obligatory as the worship of Allah, nor make a votive offering or consecrate or dedicate anything to anyone or take a vow in the name of anyone similar to the way one does these things in the case of Allah, nor should one show complete self-abasement and total humility before anyone as one is required to do before Allah, nor should one engage in the particular God-oriented acts of worship for anyone other than Allah, acts which symbolize the farthest limits of self-abasement, such as, *ruku'* and *sajdah* (the bowing and prostrating in *salāh*).

The Prayer for Guidance

The last three verses of the *Sūrah* consist of a prayer on the part of man. In other words, Allah Himself, in His great mercy, has taught man what to pray for:

إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ۝ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ ۝ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ۝

Guide us in the straight path, the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace, not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.

The Implications of Guidance

A problem of highest significance arises here. The teaching with regard to the prayer for being guided in the straight path is addressed equally to all men or all Muslims and to saints and prophets who have already received guidance and are even a source of guidance for other men. Why should these repeatedly pray for something they already possess? The answer to this question depends on knowing all that is implied by guidance. The answer would, at the same time, remove all difficulties and confusions which arise in the minds of those who, not being familiar with the true signification of guidance, begin to suspect that certain verses of the Holy Qur'ān were contradicting certain others.

The Meaning of *Hidāyah* or Guidance

The best explanation of the word, *Hidāyah* (guidance) has been offered by Imām Raghīb al-Isfahānī in his *Mufradat al-Qur'ān*, which can be summed up thus: *Hidayah* signifies leading someone towards his destination, gently and kindly; while guidance, in the real sense, issues forth from Allah alone, and it has several degrees.

The First Degree of Guidance

The first degree of guidance is general, and covers everything that exists in the universe -- minerals, plants, animals etc. It would surprise many to hear of guidance in relation to minerals. But the Holy Qur'ān makes it quite clear that all forms of existents in the universe, and every particle of dust possesses life, sensitivity, and even consciousness and understanding in its own degree and according to its own sphere of existence. Some of these existents possess more of this essence than others, and some less. Hence, those who have very little of it are considered to be inanimate and devoid of consciousness. The *Shari'ah* too has recognized this difference, and such creatures have not been made to bear the obligation of observing the injunctions of Allah. The creatures which show obvious signs of life but not those of consciousness and reason are considered to be living, but not rational; whereas, creatures showing the signs of consciousness and reason, along with those of life, are called rational beings. Because of these differences in the degrees of consciousness, men and jinn alone, of all the existents in the universe, have been made subservient to the

injunctions of the *Shari'ah* and accountable for their actions, for they alone have the necessary consciousness and understanding. But, it does not mean that other creatures or existents are totally devoid of life or sensitivity, or of consciousness and understanding. The Holy Qur'an is very explicit on this point:

وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يَسْبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ

Nothing exists that does not celebrate His praise, but you do not understand their (mode of) praising. (17:44)

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَسْبِّحُ لَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالطَّيْرِ طَفَّتْ كُلُّ قَدَّ عَلِمَ صَلَاتَهُ وَتَسْبِيحَهُ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَفْعَلُونَ ۝

Have you not seen that everything in the heavens and the earth proclaims Allah's purity, and the birds too that spread their wings? Each of them knows its prayer and its (mode of) praising. And Allah is aware of what they do. (24:41)

Evidently, one cannot extol and praise Allah without knowing Allah. It is equally evident that knowing Allah is the highest form of knowledge possible, and such a knowledge cannot be gained unless one possesses consciousness and understanding. These verses, therefore, show that everything that exists in the universe possesses life, sensitivity, understanding and consciousness, though it may not always be apparent to the ordinary observer -- a truth which has been endorsed by all the great religions, by certain ancient philosophers, and lately even by experimental science.

This, then, is the first degree of guidance which is common to minerals, plants, animals, men, jinns and all the forms of creation. The Holy Qur'an speaks of this primary and general guidance in these words:

قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى

He gave to everything its distinctive form, and then guided it. (20:50)

Or, as we find in another Surah:

سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى ۝ الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسُوَّى ۝ وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى ۝

Celebrate the name of your Lord, the Most High, Who has

created all things, well proportioned them, and Who has determined and guided them. (87:1-2)

That is to say, Allah has given every creature a particular nature and function, and guided it in a way which should correspond to its station in the scheme of things. Thanks to this general guidance, everything in the universe is performing its allotted function with such marvellous efficiency. For example, it is the ears that hear a sound and not the eyes or the nose. Similarly, the nose smells but cannot see; the eyes see but cannot smell. In short:

إِنْ كُلُّ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِلَّا آتَى الرَّحْمَنِ عَبْدًا ۝

There is nothing in the heavens and the earth but comes to the All-Merciful as a servant. (19:93)

The Second Degree of Guidance

Unlike the first, the second degree of guidance is not general but particular. It is limited to those creatures which are considered to be rational, that is, men and jinns. This kind of guidance comes to every man through prophets and revealed books. Some accept this guidance, and become believers (*Muslims*): some reject it and become disbelievers (*Kāfirs*).

The Third Degree of guidance

The third degree of guidance is still more particular, being special to true believers (*Mu'minīn*) and the God-fearing (*Muttaqīn*). Like the first degree, the third kind of guidance too descends directly to the individual from Allah, and it is called, *Tawfīq*. That is to say, Allah's grace provides a man with internal and external means and circumstances which should make it easy, and even pleasant for him to accept and act upon the guidance of the Holy Qur'ān, and difficult to ignore or oppose it. The scope of the third degree of guidance is limitless, and its levels indefinite.⁵ Here is the sphere in which man, not only can, but is required to make a progress in the veritable sense of the term. The agency of this progress is the performance of virtuous

5. Contrary to all the modern fictions about man's Evolution or Perfectibility or Progress which may pass for sound philosophy or science.

deeds⁶. All increase in virtuous deeds brings with it an increase in divine guidance. The Holy Qur'an itself gives us the promise of such increase:

وَالَّذِينَ اهْتَدَوْا زَادَهُمْ هُدًى

As for those who follow the straight path, Allah will increase their guidance. (47:17)

وَمَنْ يُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ يَهْدِ قَلْبَهُ

And whoever believes in Allah, He guides his heart. (64:11)

الَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا

Those who strive for (literally, 'in') Us, We will surely guide them in Our paths. (29:69)

It is in this field of progress that we see even the greatest prophets and men of Allah striving, and it is an increase in divine guidance and help that they keep seeking to their last breath.

A Cumulative view of guidance

Keeping in mind the three distinct degrees of guidance, one can easily see that guidance is a thing which everyone does possess in some way, and yet no one, not even the greatest, can do without wishing to attain more of its advanced and higher stages. Hence, of all the prayers man can address to Allah, the most important is the prayer for guidance, which has been taught to us in the very first Sūrah of the Holy Qur'an; and this prayer is as necessary for the greatest of prophets and men of Allah as for an ordinary Muslim. That is why the Sūrah Al-Fath (Victory), in enumerating the material and spiritual benefits of the conquest of Makkah in the last days of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, also says: *وَيَهْدِيكُمْ صِرَاطًا مُسْتَقِيمًا* (and to guide you on the straight path) (48:20). When these verses were revealed, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had already received guidance and was a source of guidance for others. The good tidings of receiving guidance can, in this situation, have only one meaning that he attained some very high station of guidance at the time.

Guidance: Some notes of caution

In concluding this discussion about the different implications of

6. As defined, it goes without saying, by the *Shari'ah* and not by individual or collective fancy, or by custom and habits, or by the fads or fashions of the day.

'guidance' (*Hidāyah*), we repeat points that would help the reader of the Holy Qur'an avoid certain confusions and errors:

1. The Holy Qur'an sometimes speaks of divine guidance as being general and common to believers and non-believers, in fact to all creatures, and sometimes makes it out to be particular and special to the God-fearing. So, the unwary may be led to sense a contradiction here. But once it is understood that one degree of guidance is common to all, whereas another degree is limited to particular cases, the doubt and confusion readily resolves itself.

2. On the one hand, the Holy Qur'an reminds us again and again that Allah does not grant guidance to the unjust and the unrighteous; on the other hand, it repeatedly declares that Allah guides all. The misunderstanding which may arise here is also dispelled by a knowledge of the degrees of guidance. Now we can easily see that the general guidance is given to all without any distinction, but the third and very special degree of guidance is not granted to the unjust and the unrighteous.

3. The first and the third degrees of guidance pertain to a direct act of divine grace, and no prophet can have anything to do with it, for the function of the prophets is related only to the second degree.

Whenever the Holy Qur'an speaks of Prophets عليهم السلام as guides, it is always referring to this second degree, and to it alone. On the other hand, when the Holy Qur'an, addressing the noble Prophet ﷺ, says: إِنَّكَ لَا تَهْدِي مَنْ أَحْبَبْتَ (You cannot guide whom you please) (28:56), it is the third degree of guidance which is intended, that is to say, it is neither the function of a prophet nor is it in his power to provide *tawfiq* to anyone, in other words, to make it easy for anyone to accept guidance.⁷

7. Translator's Note: In this context one should not overlook the popularity enjoyed in the West, since the rise of Protestantism, by the notion of a personal relationship with God on the part of the individual. This notion has in its turn produced a diffused yet very effective conviction that ethics can be made independent of religion, that the external or legislative aspect of religion is of no account, that prescribed rites are irrelevant to the so-called 'religious experience', and more monstrously still, that doctrines can be dispensed with altogether -- all of which betrays a total incomprehension of what constitutes a religion. The tendency has, in fact, begun to infect some of the modernist interpreters of Islam in one way or another, all of whom claim to be fulfilling the 'needs of the present age'. Attempts have been made even to exploit this notion for ulterior motives.

To sum up, the Qur'anic prayer *إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ* (guide us in the straight path) is most comprehensive, and certainly, one of the most important prayers taught to man. No member of the human family can claim not to need it. No success, no prosperity in this or in the other world can really come without being on the straight path. Particularly so, for man lost in the anxieties of mortal life, the prayer for the straight path is an elixir, though people do not realize it.

Which 'path' is 'straight'?

Now, to come to the meaning of the 'straight path', it is the path which has no turns and twists. The term signifies the particular way of Faith which equally avoids the two extremes of excess and deficiency. One who follows the straight path would, in matters of doctrine and practice both, neither go beyond the limits nor fall short of them.

The last two verses of the Sūrah Al-Fāṭiḥah define and identify that 'straight path', something man has been prompted to pray for immediately earlier. The verse says: *صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ* (The path of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace). As to who these people are, another verse of the Holy Qur'an gives us details in the following words:

الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَالصَّالِحِينَ

Those whom Allah has blessed, namely, the prophets, the *Siddiqin*, the *Shuhada'*, and the righteous. (4:69)

Continued

In persuading the Muslim countries to look upon themselves as 'the eastern-most part of the West', the London *ECONOMIST* argues that Islam 'also implies a one-to-one relationship between the believer and the God he believes in, a direct contact without intermediary and in this relationship, in which a single God speaks directly to the core of a single man, is the basis of individualism. The Protestant ethic is grounded on precisely the same concept.' (May 17-23, 1975, page 82 of the Special Survey).

In the light of the discussion regarding the three degrees of guidance, it should not be difficult to see that the direct contact with God without intermediary pertains only to the first and third degrees, and not the second degree where the mediation of the prophets is indispensable. To attain the third degree may be necessary for making a spiritual progress, but Islam, or for that matter any authentic religion, is born out of the second degree of guidance. One cannot, indeed, enjoy the benefits of the third degree without having accepted the guidance of the second degree -- or, to use the Islamic terminology, without following the *Shari'ah*.

These are the four categories of those who find favour with Allah. Among them all, the prophets are the greatest. The *Siddiqin* (the constantly true) are those who acquire spiritual perfection, and thus -- attain the highest rank among the followers of a prophet. In common parlance, they are called Men of Allah, or saints.⁸ The *Shuhadā'* (martyrs) are those who sacrifice even their lives for the sake of their faith (or, who bear witness to the truth, as the word admits of both meanings). The righteous (the *Salihin*) are those who follow the *Shari'ah* completely, not only in the matter of obligations (*Wajibat*) but also with regard to commendable (*mustahabb*) actions. In everyday language they are called the pious or the virtuous or the good.

This verse, then, determines the straight path in a positive manner, identifying it with the path followed by men of these four categories. The next verse, by a process of elimination, does the same in a negative manner by saying:

غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ۝

Not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.

Those who have incurred Allah's wrath are the people, who in spite of being quite familiar with the commandments of Allah wilfully go against them out of a calculated perversity or in the service of their desires, or, in other words, who are deficient in obeying divine injunctions. This, for example, was the general condition of the Jews who were ready to sacrifice their religion for the sake of a petty worldly gain, and used to insult and sometimes even to kill their prophets.

As for *الضَّالِّينَ* (those who go astray), they are the people who, out of ignorance or lack of thought, go beyond the limits appointed by Allah, and indulge in excess and exaggeration in religious matters. This, for example, has generally been the error of the Christians who exceeded the limits in their reverence for a prophet and turned him into a god. On the one hand, there is the rebelliousness of the Jews who not only refused to listen to the prophets of Allah but went on to kill them; on the other hand, there is the excessive zeal of the Christians who deified a prophet.

8. If taken in an untainted religious sense, and certainly not if taken in one of the many modern vulgarized usages of the term where, for instance, you see the halo of spiritual glory over the head of a spy!

Thus, the essential meaning of the verse is that, in praying for the straight path, we do not ask for the path of those who are the slaves of their desires, perverse in thought and action, and deficient in performing their religious obligations, nor the path of those who are ignorant or unmindful or misled, and indulge in excess and exaggeration in religious matters, but wish for a path between these two extremes, which inclines neither towards excess nor towards deficiency, and which is as free of the promptings of desires as of doubts and confusions and of erroneous beliefs.

In short, the prayer for the straight path is the essence of the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah. Since knowing and following the straight path is the real knowledge and the real achievement in this mortal world, a mistake in picking it up right takes peoples and nations to ruins; otherwise, there are even non-Muslims who claim to be seeking God and undertake stupendous labours to attain this end. The Holy Qur'ān has, therefore, defined the straight path so explicitly from a positive as well as eliminative point of view.

The Key to the Straight Path

But, before we proceed, there is another problem to be considered, the answer to which would open the door to a new and more comprehensive understanding. It would seem that in order to define the straight path it should have been sufficient to call it 'the path of the Prophet' صلى الله عليه وسلم or 'the path of the Qur'ān', which should also have been more succinct and more explicit, for the whole of the Holy Qur'ān is really an explanation of the straight path, and the teachings of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, an elaboration. But, setting aside the succinct and explicit form of expression, the Holy Qur'ān has taken up two verses of this short Sūrah for defining and delimiting the straight path positively and negatively, and has thus indicated that if one wishes to follow the straight path, one should seek such and such men 'those on whom Allah has bestowed His grace...', and adopt their way. Here, the Holy Qur'ān does not ask us to follow the 'path of the Qur'ān', for a book alone is not sufficient for the grooming of man; nor does it ask us to follow 'the path of the prophet', for the Holy Prophet ﷺ was not to be in this world for ever, and no other prophet was to come after him. So, in enumerating those whose teaching and example can help us attain the straight path, the Holy Qur'ān has, besides the prophets صلى الله عليه وسلم, included those too, who will always be found living amongst us till the last day of the world -- namely, the

Siddiqin, the *Shuhada'*, and the righteous.

For the purpose of indicating the manner in which one can find the straight path, the Holy Qur'an has thus referred not to a book but to certain men. According to a *ḥadīth*, when the Holy Prophet ﷺ informed his Companions that, like earlier communities, his '*Ummah*' too would be divided into seventy or seventy-two sects, and that only one among them would be on the right path, they wanted to know as to which group it would be. The answer he gave also leads on to certain men of Allah, for he said: مَا آتَا عَلَيَّ وَأَصْحَابِي (That which follows my way and the way of my Companions). All this comes to mean that written books or oral traditions alone cannot teach, train and discipline man; for this, one has to be with knowing men, and learning from them. In yet other words, the real teacher and groomer of man has to be another man; a book cannot take that place all by itself. How curtly this was pointed out by Akbar, the famous Urdu poet-humourist, who said:

کورس تو لفظ ہی سکھاتے ہیں
آدمی، آدمی بناتے ہیں

which, in English, comes close to saying: "Courses teach words. But, men train men." This truth holds good even for spheres of everyday life.

No one has ever become a doctor, or an engineer, or even a cook or a tailor merely by reading a book. Similarly, studying the Holy Qur'an and the *Ḥadīth* on one's own cannot by itself be sufficient for the moral-spiritual education and training of a man; such a study must be carried on under the guidance of a specialist or a genuine scholar before it can be useful. It is common observation that,⁹ many people today, though otherwise educated, cherish the erroneous notion that one can acquire a masterly knowledge of the Holy Qur'an and *Ḥadīth* merely by reading a translation or at best a commentary.¹⁰ But the error of such an enterprise is self-evident. Had a book in itself been sufficient for the guidance of men, there was no need for the prophets to be sent. But, Allah in sending us His Book, has also sent His Prophet to serve as a teacher and guide. In defining the straight path

9. Under the influence of the West, particularly that of Protestantism.

10. The illusion has been encouraged by the modernistic or pseudo-modernistic interpretations of Islam.

too, He has also enumerated those of His servants who find special favour with Him -- all of which argues that, in trying to understand the Book of Allah and to act upon it, one cannot solely rely on one's own study and judgment, but must turn to someone who knows.

The conclusion

Two things are necessary for the physical and spiritual well-being and success of man -- the Book of Allah which contains guidance for every sphere of human life, and the Men of Allah who help in making this guidance effective. The way to profit from the Men of Allah is to assess them according to the well-known principles of the Book of Allah. Those who do not conform to these principles should just not be regarded as Men of Allah. But, when one has found Men of Allah, in the real sense, one should seek their guidance in order to understand the meaning of the Book of Allah and act upon it.

Why the Schism?

As to the sectarian differences on this point, we may remark that there are two kinds of deviations in this respect. Some people elected to follow the Book of Allah alone, ignored the Men of Allah totally and gave no value to their teachings and explanations. Conversely, others adopted the Men of Allah as the only criterion of truth and became indifferent to the Book of Allah. Both these ways lead to fatal error.

Injunctions and related considerations

To recapitulate, the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah begins with the praise of Allah. Then comes an affirmation on the part of man that he worships Allah alone, and turns to him alone in the hour of need. That is, so to say, the oath of allegiance man offers to his Lord and Master. Finally, there is a prayer which covers all possible human needs and goals. Beside these, there are some related secondary considerations also which arise from the Sūrah. These are as follows:

The proper way of Praying to Allah

Through this particular mode of expression and through its structure, the Sūrah teaches man how to pray and how to make a request to Allah. The proper method is that one should begin by fulfilling one's obligation to praise Allah. Then, one should offer the pledge of complete allegiance to Allah to the effect that one does not regard anyone except Allah as being worthy of adoration and worship,